

November 6, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2016 David J. Whitcomb

COME TO THE THRONE

Job 23

On April 12, 1961, the Soviet Union launched the first man into space, Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin. His mission lasted 108 minutes. The Soviets used the feat as a major propaganda event during the cold war with the US. As propaganda devices go, often there is a good bit of dishonesty involved. Now, after the intervening 50 years, a lot of that dishonesty surrounding the first man in space has come to light. One of the most glaring issues is Gagarin's supposed statement, "I went up to space, but I didn't encounter God." Actually, Gagarin denied ever saying those words. In fact, there is some pretty good evidence that Gagarin was at the very least a God-fearing man and probably a Christian.

The statement that God was not found came from Nikita Kruchev, the evil, God-denying leader of the Communist Soviet Union. Kruchev didn't want anyone to ever see God or see evidence of God anywhere.

In reality, neither Gagarin or any other cosmonaut or astronaut has ever seen God. Few humans ever have. Old Testament people who maintained a great respect for God feared that to see Him would mean certain death. Mere humans have seen evidences of God since creation. We see His character revealed in His handiwork. We see His power of salvation illustrated in changed lives. Old timers saw manifestations of God in angels and visions. But no one sees God.

That was a problem for Job and sometimes it is a problem for us. In the last argument from his "friend" Eliphaz, Job heard this challenge: *"Agree with God, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty you will be built up; if you*

remove injustice far from your tents" (Job 22:21-23). And Job was thinking, "How can I do that? I can't even find God though I have searched diligently for Him. How can a man return to the Almighty when we can't find Him?"

We humans struggle with this reality at times. We know that God is. We see the evidence of His work all around us. We are able to read His Word to us and understand His promises. But when the going gets tough, there is something in our souls that wants a real, live God with skin on Him. Someone we can touch, talk to, be comforted by. But we know that God is a spirit. How can we get to the Eternal Spirit, our Creator, in order to learn, be comforted, and be justified?

That was Job's dilemma. That is our dilemma. The answer is in Christ alone. As we celebrate the Lord's Table, we are celebrating the only access to the invisible God available to the creation. Only through Christ can we know God and come to God. And, therefore, it is because of Christ's sacrifice that we can have peace with God. That is something worth celebrating.

Oh, That I Knew Where I Might Find Him.

What kind of people are looking for God? People like Job who said, *Today also my complaint is bitter; my hand is heavy on account of my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!* (vv.2-3). People like Job who are troubled and want answers look for God. Isn't that everyone? Trouble is part of life because of the sin principle.

When sin entered the world through Adam's disobedience, everything was thrown in disarray. God promised that nature would not cooperate with our efforts to survive, and it surely doesn't. God set the laws of entropy in motion and, just as He had warned Adam, everything began to die. God placed the man over the woman and promised that women would desire their husband's position of authority causing all manner of conflicts. Cain proved the depths of sin early on when he murdered his innocent brother out of jealousy. It seems like creation was not all that old when *the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Genesis 6:5).

Modern life is full of trouble because of sin. We have conflicts with other people, and innocent people often suffer greatly as their leaders engage in war. Corruption in government, business, and even religion is the norm. We experience sickness unto death. Natural disasters are common as the whole creation groans waiting for the day of redemption. No one is exempt from trouble.

Trouble is certain in life. But that is not all bad because often God uses the environment of trouble to draw people to search for Him. Job understood this and concluded, *For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble sprout from the ground, but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause (Job 5:6-8)*. The wake of natural disasters is a good time to tell others the good news that Jesus is the Redeemer. Many of us can remember how sensitive the American public was as a whole right after the tragedy of 9/11. One day we may have more opportunity to buy up the chance to share the good news.

But ultimately, people who realize that sin separates them from their Creator are the kind of people who look for Him. Humans are quite resilient and often dig in their heels to overcome adversity. We can generally figure out a way to endure the trial and come out on top. But we have a hard time dealing with personal sins that way. When God convicts of sin, there is only one right response: “I need to get to my Creator to have my sins forgiven.” Sadly, many people determine that if they do enough good works, they can approach God’s throne and virtually demand that God accept their payment for their sins.

In a way that was Job’s opinion. He was quite sure that he had been righteous. If he could only get to God’s throne, he would argue his case. But “where to find God” was Job’s frustration. He struggled with the same question with which people still struggle: “Who can know where to find God?” The simple answer is, “God is everywhere.” The Bible clearly teaches that God is omnipresent. Jeremiah says, *“Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:24)*. David wondered, *“Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?” (Psalms 139:7)*.

Okay, God is everywhere, but no one sees God. That reality is partly because as God warned Moses, *“You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Exodus 33:20)*. We cannot see God because, as Jesus told the woman at the well, “God is a spirit.” We see God in the evidence by which He reveals Himself. It is like watching the wind blow the leaves of the trees. We never see wind but we see the evidence. We see God in all that He has created. We see God in His Word, the Bible. We see God manifested in changed lives. One day we will see, in our glorified bodies, God seated on His throne. Job was confident that *“after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:26)*.

But in times of trouble, it seems that God is nowhere. Job complained, *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him (vv.8-9)*. The problem is that human nature is finite while God is infinite. But still the general effects of sin in life, or the conviction of our own sin, drives us to find God. But where is He? Where can we go to get answers? We ponder with Job, *Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty (Job 11:7)?* And what if you or I could get to God?

Can An Upright Man Argue With God?

Human wisdom debates with God—or thinks it can. Sin causes us to think we are God’s equal. We naturally agree with Job that, given the opportunity, *I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments (v.4)*. Pride makes us think we are able to contend with God. Pride is rooted in Satan’s original sin of thinking he could make himself like God. Therefore, by nature we believe that we are God. We naturally believe that all things should be subject to us and that we should be able to control others.

Nothing illustrates this truth better than a newborn baby. What choice do the parents have but to arrange their schedules according to the whims of the precious little baby? While it is true that little babies need to be fed on a pretty strict schedule, wise parents also understand the need to very early teach the child that he or she is not

in charge. How sad to let a child grow up believing the myth that life is about him or her.

And so in our arrogance, we believe we should be able to stand before God, inform Him about the matters in His life of which He is obviously ignorant, and expect Him to arrange our circumstances for our glory. In the end, Job would learn that nothing could be further from the truth.

And yet it is possible to have confidence that God will pay attention to our pleas. Job pleaded, *I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me (vv.5-6)*. Because God is so gracious, He does bend down and hear us. It is God's greatness that allows Him to hear us. He is certainly not required to do so.

Like Job, we think we can argue with God because we are deceived. Sin deceives us so that we believe we are okay. If I'm upright, why shouldn't God give me an audience? Job argued that because he was upright, he could argue with God. He decided that if he could actually get to God, *There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge (v.7)*. Obviously, Job thought he was THE upright man who could argue with God at His throne. Job was confident God would pronounce him innocent forever.

This is the argument of a hypocrite, or a fool, or at least a confused man. The Pharisees were quite sure they above all other people enjoyed God's favor. They hated Jesus because He kept revealing the chinks in their armor and the inconsistencies of their lives. The fool has a great ability to look in the mirror of the Bible and see only other people's shortfalls, not their own. The confused person does not realize that no one can do enough to gain perfect righteousness, much less gain the right to stand before God's throne!

Job was so confident of his righteousness that he could list the details. *My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food (vv.11-12)*. In these words, Job certainly sounded like the Pharisee who prayed in the temple *"God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this*

tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get" (Luke 18:11-12).

This is the same kind of reasoning offered by the followers of false religions. The thing that Muslims who strictly follow Sharia law, devout Roman Catholics, and determined Arminian Protestants have in common is the certainty that they can do enough righteous works that God will be required to forgive their sins. They know the works that are required according to their errant religious teachers, and they are proud to tell you how well they do these things.

But didn't God acknowledge that Job lived a pretty good life? At the beginning of the Job story we read, *And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" (Job 1:8)*. It is true that Job was devoutly committed to God. But Job didn't understand that he could be righteous only because of God's grace. Starting in chapter 38, Job learns this lesson.

But even though Job could read off a list of righteous works, he also realized that he needed a Redeemer. He told his miserable counselors, *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me! (Job 19:25-27)*. We understand and appreciate our need for the Redeemer only after we come to the end of ourselves.

In mercy God destroys our self-reliance. Job experienced that mercy of God and concluded, *Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me (vv.15-16)*. When Job contemplated God's sovereign authority, he feared. In the couple of verses that precede this confession, Job also admitted regarding God, *But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does. For he will complete what he appoints for me, and many such things are in his mind (Job 23:13-14)*. The right conclusion is that God is going to do whatever He desires to do with me, to me, and for me. That is a fearful thought. That strips me of all self-assurance, confidence in my wisdom, and my manifest destiny.

Job could not see God, but he knew full well that God was in control. And God wasn't asking Job if he agreed with His plan. And God didn't ask Job if he was happy. Human nature does not enjoy being reduced to nothing, left with no choice, no say in what will come to pass. But that is the condition we must come to in order to stand before God's throne. We can willingly submit to God in all humility and yield everything to Him now. Or we can wait until we stand before His great throne of judgment where He will consign us to eternal punishment which strips us of all we thought we owned or deserved. Such emptying is terrifying to the human soul.

To be terrified at God is a wonderful conclusion. God certainly does not desire for us to live in constant terror of Him. But our relationship with Him starts there. Terror at God's power, majesty, and authority is intended to drive us to Him. Human wisdom recoils at that idea and concludes that fear of God drives us away from Him. That is indeed the case if we desire to rebel against Him. But if we long for Him, desire Him, and realize we need Him, seeing God's perfect power and knowing His perfect righteousness, we run to Him and plead, "Forgive my offenses and give me Your righteousness."

That is the point when we experience God's promise that rest is found at His throne. God invites us to come to His "seat." He invites us to His presence where He promises to help us. The writer to the Hebrew Christians offered the invitation, *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).*

The throne room of God is not the place we waltz into carelessly or flippantly. Read John's description of that place.

At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as

it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight (Revelation 4:2-7).

We do well to always remember the awesomeness of God's throne and realize that we need Someone to take us to the throne! We cannot barge in on our schedule and according to our terms. We need a representative to gain entrance for us. Job understood this and admitted, *"Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high" (Job 16:19).* We too understand that Jesus Christ is our representative who invites us to come to the throne of God where we find grace, mercy, and help. *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25).*

We thank God for the confidence that in His presence we learn that He is unchanging. Job learned, *But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does (v.13).* That too we learn in God's presence. Do we rejoice that God is sovereign? *But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold (v.10). For he will complete what he appoints for me, and many such things are in his mind (v.14).* The knowledge of God's sovereign control gives us confidence before Him and in life. Therefore, we are not silenced by trouble. God knows and God does what is best. Therefore, we say with Job, *I am not silenced because of the darkness, nor because thick darkness covers my face (v.17).*

Even when we do not understand all the details of what God is doing in life, we still believe without wavering that God is astonishingly majestic, powerful, and fearsome. We know this because Jesus opens the door for us to come to God's throne. We cannot drag all our self-righteousness into God's throne room to bargain with God. We come to Him bereft of every ability, accomplishment or possession because we come to God's throne only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are crucified with Him and that is why we find help at God's throne.